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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST PART (PUBLIC)*
OF THE 48th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 9 December 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. ALSTON

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* The summary record of the second part (closed) of the meeting appears as document E/C.12/1993/SR.48/Add.1.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

PRESENTATION OF THE OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE OF THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited Mr. Jacques Baudot, Director of the Social Development Division and Coordinator of the World Summit for Social Development, to present to members of the Committee the activities, objectives and programme of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit for Social Development. The Committee considered the Summit to be an ideal opportunity for drawing the attention of the international community to the Covenant and the rights enunciated in it.

2. Mr. BAUDOT reminded the Committee that in 1992 the General Assembly of the United Nations had unanimously adopted a resolution by means of which it had decided to convene, in March 1995 in Denmark, a Summit which would address three core issues: the enhancement of social integration, the reduction of poverty and the expansion of employment. It had also decided to establish a Preparatory Committee in which all Member States would be represented. The Preparatory Committee had held an organizational session in April 1993 and would hold three substantive sessions before the Summit, in January and August 1994 and in January 1995.

3. The General Assembly had set for the Summit 11 objectives which constituted a general framework. Some of them were not new - international cooperation programmes in support of national programmes, re-evaluation of special protection programmes, but others were less traditional, aiming, for example, at improving the integration of the roles of the State and the market in the area of social development. The Summit would therefore cover the principles, objectives and all the players involved in social development.

4. If social, economic and cultural rights were not mentioned, it was not through negligence but because of the methods of division of labour in force within the United Nations system. The NGOs would be invited to participate in the Summit and the functioning of the Preparatory Committee would be governed by rules of procedure based on those of the Preparatory Committee for the Rio Conference. That would enable non-governmental forces to make their voices heard.

5. In substantive terms, the Summit would culminate in a declaration in which general guidelines relating to social policy in the three selected areas would be defined; the declaration would be signed by the Heads of State present. The Summit would be breaking new ground because it was planned not to entrust execution of a "plan of action" to a single focal point, but to address the recommendations emerging from the Summit to the international community as a whole, to Member States and to society in general.

6. The Summit was addressed to all countries, regardless of their size, level of development or political and economic system. It would adopt a sectoral approach to social development (employment, health, education) and would be geared to social problems which were not, generally speaking, the responsibility of clearly defined decision-making centres (social integration). Essentially, the recommendations would be addressed to national

players (undertakings, trade unions, etc.), and would provide means of defining desirable types of international cooperation and the distribution of tasks within the United Nations system with a view to their execution.

7. With regard to the relationship between the issues to be considered during the Summit and human rights questions in general, and economic, social and cultural rights in particular, the Summit would address development questions within a social perspective, so that the rights of the individual, and notably the right to development, would be fully taken into consideration. The Preparatory Committee would take account of the experience of the Rio Conference and the Vienna Conference, and of the various international human rights instruments. In that respect, the collaboration of the Committee would be particularly useful to the Summit secretariat, notably with regard to the question of social policies.

8. The link between rights, on the one hand, and responsibilities and obligations, on the other, would figure among the important questions to be taken up during the preparatory process. The Summit had received a very broad mandate owing to the complex nature of social development, on the understanding that it was necessary to build on what already existed in order to increase the effectiveness of current means of action. Wishing to adopt a coherent attitude with regard to concepts and recommendations, the Summit secretariat hoped to benefit from the knowledge, experience and observations of the Committee during the preparatory process and, possibly, during the Summit itself.

9. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to put questions to Mr. Baudot.

10. Mr. SIMMA said it would be interesting to know why the General Assembly had taken the decision to organize the World Summit. He noted with concern that questions relating to the installation of "social safety nets" aimed at ensuring minimum protection in the face of structural adjustment programmes did not figure among the important questions to be taken up during the Summit.

11. Mr. BAUDOT observed that States had very different concerns in that respect. Some wanted social policies to take account of market mechanisms and questions of effectiveness, while others wanted to install social safety nets and even granted a certain amount of autonomy to the social sector. The United Nations was trying, as was its custom, to reconcile those two extremes fruitfully.

12. In addition, some Governments considered that it would be useful to study certain issues (unemployment, migration, social malaise, economic growth with low job creation, social cohesion) on the international scale. For example, the countries of the South were particularly interested in poverty and economic development, while those of the North were mainly concerned about unemployment and social integration. It should be noted that questions relating to social safety nets and structural adjustment programmes would be included in the agenda for the Summit.

13. Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN observed that the three core issues adopted for the Summit would raise controversial and sensitive questions and should give rise

to important debates which would necessarily touch closely on the economic, social and cultural rights set forth in the Covenant. She nevertheless felt there was a danger that human rights in general, and economic, social and cultural rights in particular might be taken up as an afterthought by the Preparatory Committee.

14. Mr. BAUDOT explained that, given the prevailing tendency towards the division of labour within the United Nations system, the Summit secretariat had used the conclusions of the Vienna Conference as a basis for its decision on the issues to be considered during the Summit, particularly with regard to the right to development. Economic, social and cultural rights were not, in its view, secondary matters, but elements which must be taken into account in order to define Governments' obligations and responsibilities in the social sphere. The Summit secretariat counted on the assistance of the Committee in order to define correctly the relations between those various questions.

15. Mr. TEXIER asked what were the possibilities for cooperation between the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the World Summit's Preparatory Committee. It would be useful if the documents concerning the Summit were transmitted to the Committee and if its members could contribute to preparatory work in order to be in a position to play an active part in the actual Summit. It was also important that Mr. Baudot's visit should have practical effects.

16. Mr. BAUDOT said that various forms of practical cooperation might be considered. The experts in the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights could be invited to participate, on an individual basis, in the expert meetings which would be held as part of the preparatory process, it being understood that the Committee could not be represented as such within the Preparatory Committee, which would be composed of States. On the other hand, a text originating from the Committee could be transmitted to the Preparatory Committee and the Summit itself. The Chairperson of the Committee could make a statement at the Summit provided he addressed an official request to do so to the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee.

17. The CHAIRPERSON thanked Mr. Baudot for his presentation. The Committee, considering that, from its point of view, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna had been a failure, expected a great deal of a meeting devoted more specifically to social rights.

18. The Committee must prepare itself for the Summit and be represented at it in order to be able to express its views vigorously.

19. Mr. Baudot withdrew.

The public part of the meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.